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QUESTION OF THE VIOLATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS AND FUNDAMENTAL FREEDOMS IN ANY PART OF THE WORLD

Written statement*/ submitted by the Society for Threatened Peoples, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[3 March 2000]

*/ This written statement is issued, unedited, as received from the submitting non-governmental organization(s).

1. The tragedy of Tibet, as is well-known, stems from more than 40 years of military occupation and colonial rule by the People's Republic of China. This undeniable fact must form part of any discussion of Tibet since it embodies the sad experience of the six million-strong Tibetan people. It is the continuing inhuman suffering of the Tibetan people that has led our organisation to raise the human rights situation in Tibet within the human rights forums of the United Nations.

2. Members of the Tibetan Youth Congress from India embarked on a Hunger Strike in Geneva during the 55th session of the Commission on Human Rights, appealing to the Commission to help end human rights violations in Tibet. Regrettably the Commission decided to take no action on the draft resolution on China introduced by the United States of America and co-sponsored by Poland. In this connection it is deplorable that last year a distinguished Asian Ambassador, speaking in support of the Chinese motion to take no action, referred to the Commission on Human Rights's scrutiny of the human rights situation in Tibet and China as a "disease". In actual fact the Commission on Human Rights is the forum in which a cure for the "disease" of human rights violations. as perpetrated by countries like China, is most likely to be found.

3. The lack of any concrete action by the international community aimed at resolving the issue of Tibet is causing a build-up of frustration amongst Tibetans, the younger generation in particular. Tibetans are unable to understand why the rest of the world ignores one of the most notable examples of non-violent struggle in our time. "This frustration stems from the fact that the Tibetan people, with their unique cultural heritage, are being gradually wiped out from the face of the earth. This is a tragedy for the whole world as the Tibetan culture has tremendous potential to benefit the world, most of all millions of Chinese brothers and sistersHis Holiness the Dalai Lama said on 28 April 1998.

4. Over 1,000 individually identified Tibetan political prisoners are currently detained inside Tibet. Uncertainty as to the whereabouts of 10-year-old Gedhun Choekyi Nyima, Eleventh Panchen Lama and the world youngest political prisoner, and the Chinese authorities' refusal to disclose where he is continue to cause concern. In recent years the Chinese authorities have made contradictory statements on the subject. China refuses to provide the UN Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances and the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child with specific details of his whereabouts.

5. A Chinese website recently published an article suggesting that the young Panchen Lama had died in Lanzhou Prison No. 1 in Gansu Province. This unconfirmed news led to increased international anxiety concerning the fate of one of the most important religious figures in Tibet. The article by Ma Zhungliang, a correspondent for the Free China News Agency, revealed that the body of a young boy resembling the imprisoned Gedhun Choekyi Nyima had secretly been cremated by members of the Armed Police Force on 19 October 1999. The Chinese authorities denied the report as pure rumour. The Chinese Deputy Foreign Minister Wang Zingfan told Mr. John Battle, a U.K. Foreign Office Minister, that according to his latest information, the boy was living with his family in an unnamed location, British officials announced on 12 November 1999.

6. The politicisation of Tibet's religious institutions continues with hundreds of communist cadres "re-educating" monks and nuns by forcing them to sign written declarations affirming that "Tibet is a part of China" and denouncing His Holiness the Dalai Lama. The Chinese authorities have launched an anti-Dalai Lama campaign of public denunciation of His Holiness the Dalai Lama as a religious leader. In 1999 the Chinese authorities imposed particularly harsh measures aimed at preventing Tibetans celebrating the birthday of the Dalai Lama. For example the Lhasa city authorities held a rally commending officials for their handling of the "Trung Lha Yarsol" rituals (referring to the Dalai

Lama's Birthday). Tibet Television's broadcast of the meeting on 2 August showed Guo Jinlong telling the rally that "The successful handling of the Trung Lha Yarsol illegal activities by Lhasa City Council shows that the city has a Party Committee and Government offering strong leadership and that valuable organisational work has been done at grass roots level." A statement issued on 14 July 1999 even claimed that the birthday rituals undermined tourism: "The "Trung Lha Yarsol" practice is causing immense harm to the creation of a favourable image of the city of Lhasa …It also coincides with the vital tourist season when guests from abroad as well as from within the country start to arrive in Lhasa. Practices like throwing 'tsampa' flour at passers-by and blocking the path of travellers constitute anti-social behaviour that undermines the city's image and reputation."

7. Economically, socially and culturally Tibetan people continue to face severe discrimination. For example, most skilled jobs are held by Chinese settlers while Tibetans perform most of the menial tasks. China's taxation policy is causing increasing problems for the rural population in Tibet. Unemployment among Tibetan youth is rising at an alarming rate with prostitution on the increase among young Tibetan girls. "Social Evils", a recent report by Tibet Information Network, a London-based organisation monitoring the situation in Tibet, stated that "A conservative estimate of the total number of brothels where prostitutes can ply their trade in Lhasa municipality is approximately 1,000, but this is only taking into account…those places whose sole function is as a place where prostitutes can carry out their services to clients. But, in addition to these there is a second, and at least equally prevalent, form of establishment in Lhasa which effectively function as a brothel and is therefore defined as such by many Tibetans. These are the multiple bars, restaurants, clubs and karaoke bars that are often full of girls openly offering their services on the premises, many of which have back rooms where the prostitutes can take their clients." The report refers to an unofficial survey conducted by a Tibetan in 1998 which found 658 brothels and 238 dance halls and karaoke bars in 18 of the main streets of Lhasa. Assuming that the city has a population of 200,000, this figure of 658 brothels represent one brothel for every 304 people in the Tibetan capital - an extremely high density. Since it is calculated on the basis of 18 streets only rather than the whole city, the total number is likely to be higher.

8. Where education is concerned, illiteracy levels are shockingly high even though the Chinese authorities claim to have achieved "earthshaking progress" in all fields since Tibet's "peaceful liberation". A 1997 study conducted in India found that 96% of the children interviewed had fled Tibet for educational reasons, generally under extremely hazardous conditions and at great personal and financial cost to their family. 93% of these children had not been taught anything about Tibetan culture.

In the early 1980s the Chinese authorities reportedly sought to reinstate Tibetan as the official language of the so-called "Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR)". Since the majority of the region's population do not speak Chinese, the use of Tibetan was deemed to be important not merely for the preservation of Tibetan culture but for economic development and the dissemination of government policy and information. However, in spite of legislation and government directives on the use of 'minority' languages, implementation of the Tibetan language policy has been relatively unsuccessful. At the 1991 Conference on Tibetan Language Teaching, TAR Deputy Party Secretary Tenzin described the implementation of the Tibetan language policy as 'not working and at a stalemate'.

9. The Chinese authorities have signed the Convention on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the Convention on Civil and Political Rights. These positive steps, however, should not be construed as in any way signifying a major improvement in the overall human rights situation in China or Tibet. If Beijing is sincere in maintaining that human rights issues must be resolved through dialogue and co-operation China should now ratify the two Covenants without further delay.

10. We also welcome the fact that in recent years the Chinese authorities have issued invitations to many foreign delegations to visit Tibet, including UN human rights officials. We are hopeful that the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights will receive a positive agreement from the Chinese authorities to the call for the prompt signature of the MOU to follow up the MOI signed in 1998. Meanwhile it is hoped that the Special Rapporteur on Torture will be granted full and free access during his official mission to China and Tibet. The Special Rapporteur's mission to Tibet will be welcomed by human rights organisations, particularly since every year torture continues to claim the lives of Tibetan political prisoners. Likwise an invitation to the Special Rapporteur on Religious Intolerance to conduct a follow-up mission to China and Tibet, as the Special Rapporteur wishes, would signal a greater willingness on the part of Beijing to co-operate with this specific mechanism of the Commission on Human Rights. Nevertheless, we continue to deplore the fact that China is still refusing to allow independent access to foreign delegations who wish to observe the situation in Tibet. We are also deeply concerned by China's policy of not issuing invitations to human rights organisations such as Amnesty International and the International Commission of Jurists to visit Tibet.

11. For more than 40 years the Tibetan people have been denied their economic, social, cultural, civil and political rights. Tibetans are unable to assemble peacefully, to express their opinions freely or to form independent non-governmental organisations. There is no due process of law in their country and violations of human rights are committed on a daily basis. The Tibetans are denied their collective rights as a separate people.

12. In conclusion, we appeal to the Commission on Human Rights to monitor the human rights situation in Tibet closely and take appropriate concrete measures by censuring China for its human rights failures in Tibet. If the Commission on Human Rights wishes to preserve its credibility in the new millennium it can no longer ignore the gross and systematic violations being committed in Tibet.